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LARSON HOSTS FORUM ON WITHDRAWAL OF HMOs FROM MEDICARE

SOUTH WINDSOR - U.S. Congressman John B. Larson (CT-01) held a discussion today in South Windsor on alternative healthcare plans available to seniors should their Health Maintenance Organization withdraw services from Medicare or their area entirely. The discussion, which was held at the South Windsor Community Center on Nevers Road this morning, was attended by roughly 60 area senior citizens and a group of experts assembled by Larson to help seniors better understand the options that are available to them.

"I don't want seniors to think that simply because their HMO withdraws from Medicare that they are going to be left out in the cold. Connecticut seniors do have options available to them should something like this happen," said Larson. "There is a lot of misinformation out there and I've spoken to a number of seniors who are frightened, and this session today is part of a continuing effort to keep seniors informed with facts instead of rumor."

Among the assembled group of specialists were Margaret Gerundo-Murkette of CHOICES (C

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creening) State Coordinator at the Conn. Department of Social Services, Cheryl Diane Feuerman, an attorney with the Elder Law and Legal Assistance to Medicare Patients unit of Connecticut Legal Services, Inc., and Greg Johnson the Ombudsman for Provider and Beneficiary Outreach of United Healthcare Medicare Part B.

“One of the most important things for seniors to remember is don't panic; there is time to gather information, review options and make a decision,” said Gerundo-Murkette who stressed that because an HMO withdraws from Medicare services, does not mean that Medicare will not be available to them. Many HMO plans end on Dec. 31 and Medicare will still be available after that date, meaning that Connecticut seniors do have time to make choices.

Some HMOs that have recently withdrawn from Medicare are Aetna, US Healthcare, Cigna and Anthem Blue Cross, Blue Shield, meaning that these companies, among others, will not be providing what is called Medicare Plus Choice for seniors.

Some of the options, particularly for those living in Hartford County, are the remaining HMOs to choose from, purchasing a supplemental policy or participating in a state program called “ConnPace” which helps provide prescription drug coverage for seniors of limited financial means.

There are three counties in Connecticut that are “abandoned” or “orphaned” meaning no HMO coverage is being offered there, they are Windham, New London and Middlesex counties.

Congressman Larson is a co-sponsor of H.R. 141, the Medicare HMO Improvement Act of 1999, which would amend the Social Security Act to prevent sudden disruption of Medicare beneficiary enrollment in Medicare Plus Choice plans.

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